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On Not Meeting Arthur Noble at Grand-Pré

By Jonathan Fowler, Saint Mary's University

As an historical figure, Col. Arthur Noble is like a first rank B-movie actor: the mainstream may never have heard of him, but for the enthusiast he is a figure of great renown. To be sure, his fame is a little problematic, having accrued more from his dramatic death than from his accomplishments in life, but fame can be fickle that way.

Born in Enniskillen, Ireland, Arthur Noble came to North America around 1720 and established himself on the

Kennebec River, in what he probably regarded as the Massachusetts hinterland (Moody 1974). A rough and ready character, Noble's Ulster heritage may have inured him somewhat to colonial frontier life. When he wasn't operating his farm and trading post, he was participating in Massachusetts' wars with its French and Amerindian neighbours. He was chosen to lead an amphibious assault on the dreaded Island Battery in the 1745 Louisbourg campaign, and the following year was placed in command of a New England detachment sent to protect Annapolis Royal. It was the latter campaign which saw him installed at Grand-Pré in the winter of 1746-47 at the head of 500 chilled-through and sickly New England militiamen. Failing to heed the intelligence of his reluctant hosts, the Acadians, who warned him that his position was exposed, and refusing to believe that French forces stationed at Chignecto would attempt the perilous winter trek to meet him, he hunkered down and waited for spring.

When spring finally reached Grand-Pré, Arthur Noble's body, as well as

those of over 70 of his men, lay buried in the damp earth. Nicolas-Antoine Coulon de Villiers had crossed the frozen province and – against enormous odds – delivered nearly 300 French and Amerindian fighters to Noble’s doorstep in the pre-dawn hours of February 11th, 1747. An account later circulated in New England’s newspapers relates that Noble was cut down in his night shirt, after having received multiple wounds, by a ball “which enter’d his Forehead” (The Boston Weekly News-Letter, Thursday, March 5, 1747, p. 1.). As the attackers stormed Noble’s quarters, the crack of musketry and the screams of dying men sounded through the blizzard across the full length of Grand-Pré. When it was over, and the shattered New England force had capitulated, Charles Morris counted his dead countrymen as they were stacked into a common grave, grimly observing that only twenty had died of gunshot wounds (1748:49).

The Battle of Grand-Pré, or the Grand-Pré Massacre as it was sometimes called, sent shock-waves through New England, and has remained a subject of considerable interest among professional and avocational historians alike. It is no

exaggeration to say that New England’s revulsion at the cruel handling of its men figured in Charles Lawrence’s decision to deport the Acadians less than a decade later. His executive council was heavily populated with New Englanders, and one of his most trusted advisors on Acadian affairs – the previously mentioned Morris – was a survivor of the disaster who saw the Acadians as fifth columnists (Johnston and Kerr 2004:49; Morris 1748:45). Through the 19th and early 20th centuries, the conflict’s aftershock could still be felt, not as axe blows or bayonet thrusts, but through the duelling pens of rival historians locked in a contest over memory (Marsters 2006). Somehow, along the way, the final resting places of Noble and his men were forgotten. Well, almost.

The locations of the New Englanders’ graves, as well as the stone house to which the survivors of the French onslaught rallied, were preserved by oral tradition into the 1800s. By the closing decades of that century, animated by the Evangeline phenomenon and encouraged by the expanding markets brought about by large scale tourism (MacDonald 2005; MacKay and Bates 2010), local historians not only began to publish

accounts of the battle, but drew attention to places in the landscape thought to be associated with it (e.g. Eaton 1910:46; Herbin 1898: 61). Through this process the graves of Noble and his men were for a time recalled and even memorialized, before these monuments, too, faded and were forgotten. The exception is the Historic Sites and Monuments Board cairn located at the intersection of the Grand Pré and Old Post roads. Currently maintained by Parks Canada, it is the sole memorial to the men who lost their lives here in a chaotic fight over 250 years ago, but even this cairn has been moved from its original location. Nevertheless, it seems likely that the unmarked graves of Noble and his men are somewhere nearby.

From within Grand-Pré's complex archaeological landscape, with its Aboriginal, French, and New England components – none of which is understood very well – these New England dead will one day emerge: a mass grave containing over 70 of the soldiery, and somewhere nearby, the graves of Col. Noble and his brother, Francis, who likewise lost his life in the battle. Since the mid-1990s I have been collecting evidence of the battle with a simple goal in mind: to locate

the graves through controlled archaeological research before they are discovered – and perhaps destroyed – by some unsuspecting backhoe operator trying to dig a water line or excavate a foundation. Neither the New Englanders nor the backhoe operator deserve that.

It was a positive development, therefore, when a recent house construction project near the reported Battle of Grand-Pré grave sites triggered archaeological mitigation. Northeast Archaeological Research was hired to monitor earth-moving activity at the site, and we worked closely with landowners, contractors, and officials from three levels of government to safeguard the integrity of the archaeological resource. Having conducted a thorough background study of the site's history as a part of our ongoing research efforts in the community, we were able to move quickly and work within the project's timetables. The effort yielded a number of interesting archaeological features, and (fortunately) no human remains.

So, how did we conduct ourselves in the field and what did we learn?

Archaeology has developed a number of methodologies to detect graves. In addition to archival research methods, geophysics, geochemistry, and even sniffer dogs can be used. However, the compressed schedule mandated by the construction timetable pointed us toward a more traditional – but no less effective – approach: monitoring the mechanical removal of the topsoil. Grave shafts, like many archaeological features dug into the subsoil, become more visible once the mixed upper layer of the soil profile (the topsoil) has been removed. Ordinarily, North American archaeologists prefer to exercise caution and control when removing topsoil, working with hand tools and screening for artifacts as they go (the Europeans adopt a much more cursory approach), but within the context of mitigation projects such as this one, mechanical removal is a perfectly acceptable option. So, with intermittent rain and hail pounding off our hard hats, we watched closely for several days in April as a mechanical excavator gingerly scraped the surface off the worksite, gradually exposing the orange coloured subsoil known to soil scientists as a B-horizon (Figure 1). Ultimately, five pit features appeared, and we set to

work recording them before continuing their excavation by hand.



Figure 1 – Mechanical removal of the topsoil to expose archaeological features. (Photo by Jonathan Fowler)

Hand-excavating the five features was a tense operation, and the knowledge that one might encounter human remains engenders a combination of anticipation and unease. We proceeded methodically, but in the end the five features revealed themselves as only shallow and irregular depressions, likely to have been tree-throws (Figure 2). They contained scattered fragments of mostly late 18th and 19th century ceramics, as well as fractured representatives of the ubiquitous clay pipe family. In one case, a feature produced a shallow setting of dry-laid stones along with artifacts dating to the second half of the 19th century (Figure 3). Although the stonework

had been disturbed prior to our arrival, enough remained to tentatively identify it as a privy. If so, it was disappointingly clean.



Figure 2 – Delineation of a shallow pit feature (dark soil, center), clearly visible against the more uniform subsoil. (Photo by Jonathan Fowler)

Virtually absent from the site was any significant evidence of the pre-Deportation Acadian occupation. There was no Saintonge coarse earthenware, no daub, nor any cellars of the inhabitants' houses. We know Acadian Grand-Pré was a populous place, but it seems nobody had built a house on this particular spot. A few meters away and it might be a different story.

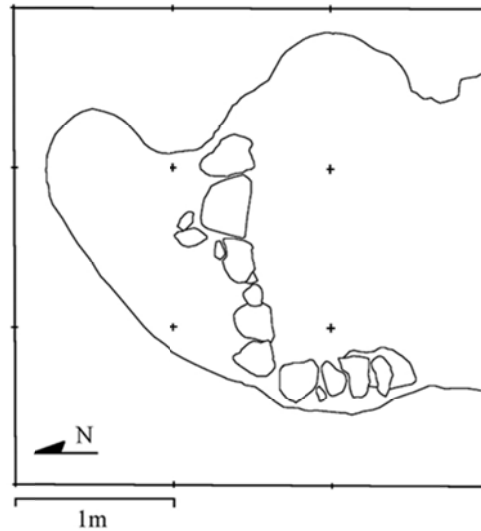


Figure 3 – One of the features appears to have contained the remains of a late 19th century privy, but it revealed very few artifacts. (Drawing by Jonathan Fowler)

Perhaps we did detect an echo of the 18th century landscape in the distribution of the pit features we encountered, three of which were regularly spaced in a north-south alignment. If they were tree-throws, this pattern would be consistent with the regular spacing we typically see in an orchard, and both aerial photography and historical records indicate that orchards were present on this lot for many decades. In fact, the presence of an orchard on the property can be traced back as far as the last will and testament of Andrew Davison, one of the early New England Planter landowners, which was drawn up in 1784 (Kings County

Probate Records, PRO D-2). Given that the Acadians were such skilled orchardists themselves, it is tempting to connect Davison's trees with the pre-Deportation period, but this would be pure speculation.

When it comes to evaluating the project's results in light of its purpose, which was to ensure that construction activities did not needlessly disturb human remains, we are on much firmer ground. We did not meet Arthur Noble at Grand-Pré, but this does not make the project a failure. The methods we employed are sound, and they producing several previously unrecorded archaeological features that were duly excavated and recorded. We learned a little more about this place in the process, and revisiting the archival record produced additional information about the battle that has already informed a new round of field investigations. But the central question remains unanswered: where are the graves of Col. Noble and his men? Given the pace of change in this landscape, it is probably only a matter of time before the activities of the living collide with the remains of the dead. So a further question arises: will we choose to meet them purposefully, through archaeological research and

mitigation, or accidentally, because we do not know or care enough to act responsibly? ♦

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On Finding Samuel Copp at Grand-Pré

By Jonathan Fowler, Saint Mary's University

Practically nobody knows Samuel Copp. This is really unfortunate, especially because so many of us have been to his place. I'll explain.

Deportation of the Acadians, and the ruined French colonial landscape must have been a strange sight to the New Englanders: empty and burned out buildings, gardens and yards choked with weeds and debris, desultory evidence of looting. Stranger still were the hundreds of



Figure 1 - The street pattern of Horton Town Plot, laid out in 1760, as viewed from the air. Grand-Pré National Historic Site is indicated with an arrow.

Archival records list Samuel Copp among the Connecticut immigrants who moved to the Grand-Pré area in the 1760s. This was after the

acres of stump land surrounding the old settlements, dotted with stands of evergreens. The French had farmed on the dykelands but had done little to prepare the uplands for the plough. All of this was novel to these New England Planters.

Within a short time of their arrival, Charles Morris, Nova Scotia's Chief Surveyor, had arrived to lay out the new community's grid plan of streets and lots. He chose to place it at Vieux Logis, on the banks of the Gaspereau River, which would offer a convenient situation for landing and embarking people, animals, and supplies. This would become Horton Town Plot – later Hortonville – and although it failed to urbanize in the manner its designer had envisioned, its distinctive grid pattern of streets is still visible in aerial photos and satellite images (Figure 1).

In the months following the establishment of Horton Township, local surveyors began the time-consuming process of measuring and marking out hundreds of properties for the new settlers. In some cases – notably on the dykeland – the old Acadian boundaries were maintained, but in most other instances they were erased and written over. A new, arrow-straight road was extended from the west end of the town plot in the direction of modern-day Wolfville. The surveyors' lack of interest in the relict Acadian landscape is evidenced by the way in which he disregarded features from that earlier time. Near the top of the hill overlooking Grand-



Figure 2 - The path leading from the statue of Evangeline to the memorial church in the distance runs along the eastern edge of Samuel Copp's property. Copp's land is on the left-hand side of this picture.

Pré National Historic Site, for instance, the new road drove straight across an Acadian house and yard. Eventually, remnants such as this would all but disappear.

With the new patchwork of land divisions taking shape, the settlers literally drew lots, each receiving a mix of dykeland, upland, and woodland. Samuel Copp drew – among other properties – a parcel of upland that now forms a part of Grand-Pré National Historic Site: a

rectangular lot to the west of the path connecting the statue of Evangeline to the memorial church (Figure 2). What he and his family faced here when they took possession we would love to know. Tradition holds that the old parish church of St-Charles-des-Mines and its priest's house stood nearby, and both would have been clearly evident to the Copps.

Fast-forward two hundred and forty years. It is the spring of 2010 and a group of Saint Mary's University student-archaeologists is busily excavating a test trench west of the memorial church. Their aim is to recover evidence of St-Charles-des-Mines, the ruins of which were reported in this vicinity by antiquarians over a hundred years earlier. A program of geophysical survey had confirmed sub-surface anomalies consistent with archaeological materials, but the students soon discover something the antiquarians never knew: the vast majority of these materials – such as the large volume of Creamware ceramics – clearly post-dated the Acadian occupation. The 2010 excavation season revealed further evidence of a substantial New England Planter presence west of the memorial church. Our excavations in

that year traced the course of a large, stone-filled drain feature until it disappeared (as does so much Grand-Pré archaeology) under a hedge. Surely this feature connected to a house, but where was it?



Figure 3 - Below the topsoil (beneath a line connecting the two arrows), the cellar feature is distinguished only as a slight difference in soil colour and texture.

The 2011 excavation season finally pulled several strands of this mystery together by locating the missing

house. Along the way we received a powerful lesson in the importance of interpreting soils in archaeology. The new excavation unit was introduced between the hedges at the height of land west of the memorial church (the ideal situation for a house, we thought). But after the dark brown topsoil had been carefully trowelled away, neither drain trench nor cellar revealed itself. Instead, a very faint soil distinction told the tale: at the west half of the excavation the usual orangey subsoil told us we had reached the end of the cultural layer, but on the east end this material took on a pinker hue (Figure 3). What would have been a tough distinction to make in bright sunlight was fortunately an easier determination under the damp, grey skies of May, 2011, and we set to work excavating “pinkie”. Happily, this layer of fill soon gave way to a cellar, of which our excavation had caught the southwest corner. Much of the stonework had been robbed out, and the processes of farming and landscaping had later concealed the rest (Figure 4).

All that remained was to determine who lived here. Could this have been a part of the old Acadian village, or perhaps one of the buildings



Figure 4 - The southwest corner of the cellar at the end of excavation. The large stones are part of the fill.

associated with the parish church? Its location near the center of Grand-Pré National Historic Site encourages speculation along these lines, but in fact the evidence takes us in a different direction. Acadian-period artifacts were almost wholly absent even in the fill layers, implying that

this was an area of relatively low activity – certainly low domestic activity – prior to 1755. Most importantly, from the occupation level at the deepest layer of the cellar, we recovered no pre-Deportation material. Artifacts dating to the New England Planter era, by contrast, were present, supporting the unavoidable inference that this structure belonged to Horton Township rather than Acadian Grand-Pré.

Determining who lived at a site can be a tricky business in archaeology, especially in circumstances involving forced migration, and where record-keeping was haphazard even at the best of times. Acadian Grand-Pré was never well mapped, and whatever land records formerly existed have long since perished with their owners. But since we are dealing with an occupation on the Planter side of the timeline, we have more to work with, including the records referenced above concerning Samuel Copp. Through the Planter land records, we can begin to tentatively connect the archaeological record to individuals rather than just to groups. Samuel Copp was the first of the New England Planters to own this property, and although he sold it

in 1766, later records suggest that the Copp family occupied a house near the north end of this lot, close to the marsh. Could this be our structure?

Samuel Copp was in his late fifties when he moved to Horton, so, especially by the standards of his day, he was not a young man when he moved his family from Connecticut. Whether he was drawn by ambition or pushed by forces beyond his control to make this move we do not yet know, for at this stage very little has been written about him. Regardless of what clues remain to be coaxed and collated from the historical record, an opportunity now exists to meet Samuel Copp and his family – and their neighbours – archaeologically. We have only excavated a small portion of early Horton Township, but having come even this short distance into the inquiry we are reminded that an archaeological landscape is not neatly divided into distinct mnemonic units. Archaeologically speaking, at least, Grand-Pré National Historic Site is both Acadian Grand-Pré and Planter Horton, and in examining the relationship between these two connected entities we have an opportunity to better perceive both.♦

O Pjila'si Mi'kma'ki: Ta'n Weji-sqalia'tiek Mi'kmaw Place Names Digital Atlas and Website Project

By Trudy Sable, Saint Mary's University and Roger Lewis, Nova Scotia Museum

In 2010, *Pjila'si Mi'kma'ki: Ta'n Weji-sqalia'tiek Mi'kmaw Place Names Digital Atlas and Website Project* was launched to document 13,000 years of presence of the Mi'kmaq within Mi'kma'ki, the place of the Mi'kmaq, and to raise public awareness of this long history. The project was initiated by the Tripartite Forum Culture and Heritage Committee Place Names Subcommittee, and is being developed in partnership between the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, Saint Mary's University/Gorsebrook Research Institute's Office of Aboriginal and Northern Research, Mi'kma'ki All Points Services, Parks Canada Agency, and the Nova Scotia Museum, with support from Kwilmu'kw Maw-klusuaqn Negotiation Office and the Mi'kmaw Association of Cultural Studies. It is currently funded through two grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), with supplemental funding from the Tripartite Forum, and Saint Mary's University. A second, complementary project, was launched

in 2012 with funding through the Tripartite Forum and SMU entitled, *Re-thinking Mi'kma'ki: The Traditional Districts and Cultural Landscapes of the Mi'kmaq*. We are fortunate to have been able to fund thirteen internships to Mi'kmaw students and researchers through various student grants, SSHRC, and SMU funds.

To date, the research team and interns have researched and recorded over six hundred place names collected through interviews with Mi'kmaw Elders and other knowledge holders, as well as historical documents and dictionaries. These names are being translated and transliterated into the Smith/Francis orthography (spelling system) under the supervision of linguist, Dr. Bernie Francis, and then geo-referenced with supervision from Roger Lewis of the Nova Scotia Museum, Dr. Trudy Sable (SMU), and William Jones, geomatics consultant for the project. These names are then entered into a database as the basis of the digital atlas. We have also developed numerous map layers for cross-referencing physiological and cultural/historical information.

The digital atlas will directly support other Mi'kmaw activities including the development of educational products for schools and the promotion of cultural awareness about Mi'kmaw people. The digital atlas will also form the basis for Pjila'si Mi'kma'ki: Ta'n Weji-sqalia'tiek Mi'kmaw Place Names Website, a multimedia, interactive, educational website that will be available by the autumn of 2013 and accessible throughout the world.♦

Curator's Corner.....

By Katie Cottreau-Robins, Nova Scotia Museum

Nova Scotia archaeology experienced another banner year in 2011. The number of heritage research permit applications approved for archaeological work once again exceeded the previous year's total. A high percentage of the applications approved were associated with archaeological resource impact assessments conducted prior to development projects. This field work was complimented by applications ranging from graduate level directed research to basic field reconnaissance by archaeology advocates to record

surface features. All in all, 2011 was another fascinating, diverse and robust year of archaeology across the province. Here are a few highlights from the field and from within the Nova Scotia Museum archaeology section.

Significant Donation to the Nova Scotia Museum

In 2011, following his retirement from the Anthropology Department of Saint Mary's University, Dr. Stephen Davis contacted the Nova Scotia Museum about making a donation to the archaeology research library. Over ten boxes of materials, consisting of Nova Scotia and Maritime project files, field notes, photographs and slides, artifact catalogues, research notes, reports and related correspondences, arrived in mid-winter. A considerable amount of the material was dated pre Special Places Protection Act (1980), meaning the fieldwork and research took place before archaeological work became subject to the provincially-legislated requirements of heritage research permit applications and the subsequent submission of reports. Dr. Davis' donation added significant value to our pre-Special Places resource library as well as more than

a few moments of humor thanks to 1970s era field images.



Guess who in '72? (S. Davis Collection)

Upon arrival to the Museum, the materials experienced preliminary organization. A more thorough filing will take place over the next six months. Thank you to Dr. Davis for his generous donation of a wide-ranging collection that provides insights to such archaeology projects as Cellar's Cove, Rafter Lake, Debert, Lake Micmac, Central Trust, Castle Frederick, Annapolis River, Bear River, Clam Harbour, the Eastern Shore, the Bain Site, Whites Lake, the Shubenacadie Canal, as well as private collectors.

Testing Methodologies at Debert

Pre-development archaeological testing has been underway on the Debert Transfer Lands since March 2008 (see the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage and the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs and the Standards for Archaeological Impact Assessment and Reporting in Debert and Belmont, Nova Scotia).¹ Field crews working on archaeological testing projects on the Debert Transfer Lands have on several occasions encountered wet areas which have hampered the completion of testing required for the clearance of land parcels scheduled for development. In an effort to address the recurring problem of wet areas and incomplete archaeological testing, the Debert Standards Archaeological Review Committee

¹ When planning to conduct archaeological work in Debert, it is important to recognize the significance of that place. The MOU and the Debert Standards were developed in support of such recognition and to ensure the protection, study and/or archaeological mitigation of Palaeo Indian archaeological resources on the Debert Lands. The Debert Standards recognize the distinct context and history of the Palaeo Indian sites and finds that are scattered over more than 1000 acres in diverse topography and sediments.

undertook an archaeological field methodology research project in July 2011. The research project tested field methods specifically designed to address water encountered in the field during test excavation.

The field research was a collaborative project between the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage (NSM), the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq (CMM) and Kwilmu'kw Mawklusuaqn Negotiations Office (KMKNO).²

Representative archaeologists from the three organizations spent a week on a land parcel in Debert addressing the challenges that arise when archaeologists encounter water at various depths and intensities. Sponging, bailing (small bucket with an arm in a deep test unit) and hand pumping were tested successfully as methods to remove low to moderate water levels. Mechanical pumping was useful for higher water levels though budgetary considerations must be made for additional

equipment and fuel. Wet sieving with multiple screens and sediment coring were tested as methods for determining the presence or absence of artifacts in test pits where traditional excavation and stratigraphic recording were not possible due to water levels. It was also determined that employing a larger crew at very wet pits helped considerably to expedite water removal while excavation and recording took place. Insights gathered while testing methodologies now provide guidance to field crews encountering water and help facilitate



A pump hose removes water from a test pit in Debert. (K. Cottreau-Robins, 2011)

² Dr. David Scott of Dalhousie University's Earth Sciences Department also joined the team in the field for two days and assisted in a sediment coring exercise in a nearby wetland.



Sediment coring in Debert. (K. Cottreau-Robins, 2011)

the successful completion of pre-development archaeological testing on the Debert Transfer Lands. Results of the field research have also been incorporated into recent revisions in the Debert Standards document.

Histoire de l'Acadie: New Approaches and New Approaches to Interdisciplinary Research in the Nova Scotia Government

In 2011 two notable seminars were held that provided archaeologists the opportunity to discuss current projects and approaches to research. The seminars were designed to attract archaeologists and other specialists and professionals in the

history and heritage field. *Histoire de l'Acadie: New Approaches* took place at Saint Mary's University and was hosted by the Gorsebrook Research Institute for Atlantic Canada Studies and the Anthropology Department. Historians and archaeologists, specializing in the seventeenth and eighteenth century history of Acadia, presented papers on marshland colonization in Acadia and France, competing sovereignties, the Brown manuscripts, seventeenth century Massachusetts connections, eighteenth century archaeology in Acadie and the geography of competition in Acadia. All the papers were rich with recent discoveries from the archives and in the field as well as new ideas about this intensely dynamic period in Nova Scotia's history. Adding thoughtful commentary and flavor to the day were respondents Maurice Basque (Université de Moncton) and Marc Lavoie (Université Sainte-Anne). Of particular interest among attendees was the First Nation presence over the two centuries of French/Acadian settlement and activity. It was suggested that a second seminar day be developed that focused specifically on those impactful interactions as revealed through the historical and archaeological records.

The New Approaches to Interdisciplinary Research was a seminar hosted by the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic and organized by heritage and history professionals from various provincial government departments. The goal was to provide an interdepartmental professional development forum to further the work of provincial government research staff and to create synergies across disciplines and departments by sharing experiences of projects while highlighting contemporary themes, problems and trends in curatorial, archival, historical and archaeological research and management. Several five to ten minute presentations were made by discussants to generate wide-ranging and engaging audience questions and discussions on themes such as new research methods, archival digitization, new electronic sources and databases, collections on line initiatives, War of 1812 effects on African Nova Scotian and aboriginal communities, war and memory/commemoration, oral history as a source, interview methodologies and ethical concerns. Discussion was lively and focused on synchronizing projects, sharing resources across departments and keeping the dialogue going. Like Histoire de l'Acadie, the conclusion at

the end of the day was that another seminar was needed.♦

Editor's Note:

The purpose of this newsletter is to improve communication of research in Nova Scotia between archaeologists and to inform the broader public. A special thanks to all the authors for making this another successful edition of Archaeology in Nova Scotia News.

Stephen Powell, NSM